

MOLDOVA – Advice from Fulbright Alumni

The following are extracts from Fulbright Grantee Reports and are not meant to reflect the views of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), its cooperating agencies, or the U.S. Embassy.

Please provide any information on the aspects of local culture that could help future Fulbright grantees working in your host country or institution(s).

Grantees who are teaching in Moldova need to insure that they have been fully informed of the semester schedule and the holidays during the semester. It is very different from U.S. institutions. They should also be aware that cheating on exams is a problem in classes (even with graduate students). I had to physically separate students and prepare two sets of exams to stop the practice. I found out during the course of the semester that this is a common problem in classes. Students also share much of the work they do on assignments. Each assignment should have questions that require answers that are specific to individual students. Moldovans are warm and wonderful people. I was fortunate to visit a few families in their homes while I was here, this is part of the Fulbright experience that should not be missed. Living in the central part of Chisinau (within walking distance of Stefan Cel Mare Park and Cathedral Park) is important to fully participate in the cultural activities offered by venues located in this part of the city. There are events almost every evening; they are very inexpensive.

People in Moldova are very friendly and interested in your impressions of Moldova. The city of Chisinau is very easy for travel via public transportation. If the grantee does not speak either Russian or Romanian, it is important to find contacts at his or her host institution who will converse in English. Professors at the universities often have another job, because the university pay is very very low, so many do not have time to chat informally. The grantee needs to take the initiative to make appointments for meetings, for guest lecturing and collaborative activities. If you persevere, the local people will both help you and solicit your assistance as needed. If you need the Embassy staff to do something, you must ask them. They will not volunteer or check with you on what is needed unless you ask. If you do want their assistance, they will be helpful and they can provide contacts if you reach the right person and give them some time.

I would be happy to talk to anyone you might send to Moldova. I can be reached at jsm2@mail.usf.edu I loved living in the City Center. I found it to be a vibrant city with lots going on. I am a huge fan of the Opera and Ballet Theater (we were able to sit front and center in the Orchestra section for less than the cost of a movie ticket back home) There is too much for me to include here, but I am very happy to share in a conversation. And please direct folks to my blog! I tried to give people a sense of what it was like to live in Moldova.... www.jainmoldova.blogspot.com

Both times I was in Moldova, I spent the majority of my time in Chisinau. I found Moldovans to be very friendly and helpful.

Please provide any recommendations related to logistics (e.g., travel, money, housing) that could help future Fulbright grantees working in your host country or institution(s).

There are many apartments available in Chisinau. Often the Soviet style apartment blocks have vacant units and the rent is cheaper than in newer apartment buildings. If you want to pay less rent and experience life in a Soviet style building renting in an apartment block is the way to do it. Public

transportation is very good and getting better. There is no need to rent or purchase an auto while in Chisinau.

I recommend finding out on your arrival or before when there are local or regional holidays so you can decide what to do during those times. There are opportunities to travel to other countries via travel agency programs and some of the flights from Chisinau have reduced fares certain days at selected times of the year. I used Glemus to hire a driver on two occasions and while it was a bit expensive, the driver and overall service was excellent so I was very satisfied. I found housing through Barbara -- Fulbright and Embassy contact. I recommend getting temporary housing for 3-5 days before you arrive and then search for location you want to find your long term housing. There seems to be adequate housing at reasonable prices in several locations around Chisinau. I brought \$\$ and there are many commission free places to change to local or even regional currencies. My visa debit bank card worked at ATM and I was charged \$3.50 per time I changed money, regardless of amount changed. I had no problem taking up to \$400 per time from ATM and while I used the same one for all transactions, I think there are many that would be safe and reasonable for getting currency.

I found it very easy to locate good housing. It is an entirely cash economy. I even paid my rent in cash! I did, however, use my ATM card at the grocery store. I never had an issue using the ATMs to get cash (and I was never assessed a fee). I was traveling to Eastern Europe "alone" with a 5-year-old. Some people here looked at me like I was crazy, but we really had no issues. Even the travel guides were a bit over the top (about roving packs of wild dogs, ATM scams, etc). I guess it is good to have a healthy dose of caution. We had an amazing time in Moldova. It may vie for the "poorest country in Europe" -- but we found this experience to be richly rewarding in more ways than I could possibly include in this survey. Transportation throughout Chisinau is very good. There are many options available, including taxis, busses, and maxi-taxis. Oleg's Taxi Service is excellent (contact number is available from the US Embassy). Housing is relatively expensive if you leave in the downtown area. Both times we were in Chisinau we rented our apartment through the Glemus Company. While our apartment was relatively expensive (1000 euros per month), the service was excellent. Our daughter attended Quality School International (QSI). Instruction is in English and many teachers hold US teaching certificates. We were very pleased with QSI. There are plenty of ATMs throughout Chisinau. However, most ATMs will only allow you to withdraw 3000 lei per transaction. However, an Italian bank (unsure of the exact name) will allow you to withdraw 5000 lei per transaction. Check with the US Embassy regarding the name of the Italian bank.

My suggestion for adjusting is to rent an apartment from the Fulbright contacts here in country for the first two weeks. Then in that time I suggest finding a host family to stay with. Host families have their ups and downs, but I think it's the best way to go to learn the language and to have company to be with, especially in the first couple months. The grantee can look on <http://www.makler.md/> for information on people who are looking for a renter.

Future grantees should use the cab service suggested by the embassy staff and contact the company via email before arrival so it runs smoothly. This is especially important for those who don't speak the local language.

I have used ATMs exclusively. I also brought Euros and some US dollars that I have used as well. Euros have proven much more useful than dollars.

Really, the best suggestion I have to get acquainted with the people is to live like the people. I decided not to live in a spacious ex-pat style accommodation and instead lived with host families. Yes, it's a bit more inconvenient and drives me crazy occasionally, but it is totally worth it.

It has been difficult to adjust to living in a place where two languages (Romanian and Russian) other than English are commonly spoken. I immediately registered for a Romanian language class and was pleasantly surprised to find that it is taught in Russian. No one at the language school speaks English so I have had to adjust to learning in as Moldovans do every day - in two languages.

Before coming to Moldova, I was a vegetarian. However, since Moldovans take great pride in feeding their guests, I started eating meat again in Moldova so as not to appear rude. I've gotten used to the electricity not always working, the water being sporadically turned off, and the heat working intermittently. I've also adapted the facial expressions of the local population and I don't smile as much.

Please provide any information on web sites or other resources you found helpful that could help future Fulbright grantees working in your host country or institution(s).

http://citymap.md/index_en.php on-line map of Chisinau

<http://www.chisinau.md/tabview.php?l=ro&idc=534> trolleybus, autobus, and maxitaxi routes

The www.fest.md/en/events/concerts site gives updates re concerts and activities. The Chisinau ex pats group at yahoo run by Rich Roesing at the U.S. Embassy provides weekly information as well as putting you in touch with other ex pats. There is a Chisinau web site-- www.md4ever.com-- that provides an interactive map showing locations in the city as well as routes for buses, trolleys and microvans to get around. www.emoldova.net provides some general info about Moldova. I found a number of sites via google including ones that would translate to or from Romanian- www.stars21.com/translator The Embassy newsletter is mostly for Embassy employees, but sometimes it provides info about activities available to Fulbrighters

There is very little available on the Internet regarding Moldova. The US Embassy will hold an introductory session for Fulbright grantees regarding logistics shortly following your arrival in Chisinau.